

LITERACY AND CURRICULUM IN THE UNITED STATES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the literacy and curriculum for promoting inclusive education by reviewing the design for the learning environment in inclusive education and reviewing the discourse around the education systems. The discourse about the introduction of an inclusive system into the secondary education system is assessed in conjunction with a discussion of the issues about academic achievement in US secondary schools. Through reviewing the articles on these topics, the issues on the relationship between the literacy of the students of minority groups and the school curriculum is to be discovered.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, Curriculum, Inclusive Education, Instruction

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INTRODUCTION

Agenda on Inclusion through Reviewing Literacy

The discourse about the introduction of an inclusive system into the secondary education system is assessed in conjunction with a discussion of the issues about academic achievement in US secondary schools. Savich (2008) points to the merits of including students with special needs, one being that they are expected to improve their communication skills and social abilities in inclusive settings. Although various instructional strategies have been developed and introduced into many schools and classrooms in both countries, they were judged to have had limited success from the viewpoint of full inclusion and effectiveness. How to maintain diversity in classrooms has been a debate in the field. The result is less participation by students with special educational needs in the learning environment and fewer opportunities for them to engage in effective learning. There is, moreover, a gap between the introduction of the issue of inclusive education on the political stage and actual teaching practice in the classroom. Hart et al. (2007) pointed out that students "who have been identified as having 'special' and 'additional' educational needs are especially vulnerable to these negative effects", and the "vulnerability is compounded when teachers also believe that such students need specialist teaching that they have not been trained to provide, a common finding reported in the international research literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. Florian shows four types of participation in inclusive classrooms; participation and access, participation and collaboration, participation and achievement, and participation and diversity. Research focused in the possibility of special pedagogy and the relationship between literacy and curriculum in inclusive settings are needed.

Methods

A search was conducted on resources, abstracts and databases, including Educational Resource

Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Complete, Education Full Text, and professional organizations. It can be said that this review is limited to the US and Japanese context and literature due to the fact that this literature considered these components more than other nations.

FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Differentiated Instruction

The discourse about the introduction of an inclusive system into the secondary education system is assessed in conjunction with a discussion of the issues about academic achievement in US secondary schools. Savich (2008) points to the merits of including students with special needs, one being that they are expected to improve their communication skills and social abilities in inclusive settings. Deno and his colleagues (1996) suggest an "integrated collaborative model" to meet the special needs of students in the classrooms, which would both promote disabled students' participation in the education of non-disabled students and offer specialized programs by teaching staff in regular classrooms. Although various instructional strategies have been developed and introduced into many schools and classrooms in both countries, they were judged to have had limited success from the viewpoint of full inclusion and effectiveness. How to maintain diversity in classrooms has been a debate in the field. Norwich (2007) presents the dilemma teachers face when responding to the various types of special needs and learning difficulties that students experience, on the one hand, and to the issues of academic achievement and participation in substantive learning, on the other. These analyses reveal two important issues. One is a shortage of skills and expertise when it comes to inclusive education, especially among teachers of non-disabled students. The other is the weakness of a system that might allow and encourage staff to collaborate in and out of school. The result is less participation by students with special educational needs in the learning environment and fewer opportunities for them to engage in effective learning. There is, moreover, a gap between the introduction of the issue of inclusive education on the political stage and actual teaching practice in the classroom. Some strategies like Florian's "special pedagogy" (2008) which aim at a systematic formulation of the training of teachers for special needs education are to be examined. Florian et al. shows how teachers make meaning of the concept of inclusion in their practice by exploring theoretical assumptions drawn from the literature about inclusive pedagogy. The analysis "enabled to identify practical examples of inclusive pedagogy that met the standard of extending what is generally available to everybody, as opposed to providing for all by differentiating for some." As for students with special educational needs, the concept of specialist pedagogy and inclusive pedagogy has an implication for promoting the teachers' professional development and designing the School as Learning Communities. In special needs education, individual learning and training are so required, but in an inclusive educational vision with reasonable accommodation, all students are connected to the others. Hart et al. (2007) pointed out that students "who have been identified as having 'special' and 'additional' educational needs are especially vulnerable to these negative effects", and the "vulnerability is compounded when teachers also believe that such students need specialist teaching that they have not been trained to provide, a common finding reported in the international research literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. Florian shows four types of participation in inclusive classrooms; participation and access, participation and collaboration, participation and achievement, and participation and diversity. Further research are focused in the possibility of special pedagogy and the relationship between literacy and curriculum in inclusive settings.

Teaching Professionals

Teachers, researchers, and parents have challenged this kind of homogeneous grouping practice because students

with LD are separated from mainstream education, limiting interaction with their mainstream peers and often receiving inferior instruction. Research has indicated that students with LD benefit from learning in an environment that engages them in peer-interaction and authentic literacy learning activities. (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

The inclusive model aims to educate as many students with disabilities as possible in regular classroom settings while still meeting their unique needs based on the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Jacobs & Fu (2014)

Jacobs et al, also suggests out that it is important to point out that the inclusive model alone does not guarantee academic gains; however, students with mild LD who are educated along with their peers in an integrated educational setting have been found to benefit academically, socially, and emotionally (Feretti, MacArthur, & Okolo, 2001).

FINDINGS ON LITERACY AND CURRICULUM

Implications from Vygotskian Perspectives

In his collected works of essays and lectures, Vygotsky's essays and lectures that focus on "Defektologia" has been gathered, especially in the abnormal psychology, learning disabilities, and special education, and cognitive function below the normal range. The relevance between this study and Vygotsky's research on "Defectology" is a function of the social and cultural-historical framework through which Vygotsky understood and interpreted human diversity and socialization, a perspective that is useful both for the sorts of children of difference that serve as his focus, and for people who depart from the evolutionally norm in other ways (Smagorinsky, 2012).

Vygotsky's (1993) belief in the importance of the collective and the ultimate individual appropriation of cultural practices via cultural tools. To balance attention to the two foci is said to be a challenge that permeates Vygotsky's work in general. Vygotsky's attention to cultural practice as the process in which all development is embedded the framework within which he considered the matter of "defectological" education. For all students, psychological development is culturally channeled to enable the appropriation of conventional mediational tools (Smagorinsky, 2012).

Smagorinsky also suggests that Vygotsky's vision of educational treatment and instruction with special needs. Vygotsky's (1993) vision for the education of "extranormal" learners was geared toward the ultimate development goal of achieving social status. Toward this end, although he believed in the construction of special schools for "defectological" education, he assumed that the entire process of development is identical for students of difference and those who meet the diagnostic norm.

Smagorinsky (2012) also suggests that even in separate schools, students of normal and "extranormal" biological makeups should be educated in a similar manner, with the primary difference being the cultivation of alternative pathways to participation in routine cultural practice emphasized in the special schools with special educational needs. Vygotsky implored, regardless of the norms they follow, should contribute to the development of a socially-accepted human capable of "social labor" not in degrading, philanthropic, invalid-oriented forms, but in forms which correspond to the true essence of labor" (Vygotsky, 1993, pp.108-109).

Vygotsky argues, "a retarded child masters abstract thinking with the greatest difficulty because the school excludes from its material anything which demands any attempt at abstract thinking, and it bases its instruction on concreteness and visual methods. For example, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) concluded radically that intelligence inferred from "intelligence tests" remain influential in such groups as the Bradley and Heritage Foundation, and identified through

measurements claimed to be culturally neutral. In contrast to Herrnstein and Murray's view that factors such as race are correlated with degrees of intelligence, researchers such as Moll (1990) find that departures from society's norm don't represent deficient ways of being, but rather that they represent forms of activity designed to suit specific cultural goals.

Another implications of Vygotsky's "defectological" essays is that the development of children involves the integration of the whole of the individual's functioning in relation to cultural mediation (Smagorinsky, 2012).

A Case Study

Uenou (2002) interpreted the issue of literacy for children with hearing loss as a problem of integration. At first, he criticized the principle of spoken communication and easy integration for misunderstanding the literacy acquisition a hearing-impaired child gets not in schools but from the parents (most cases, mother). It is often said that the academic achievements of integrated children is considerably low, but academic achievement was also seen as having nothing to do with language ability. The premise of this view is that language ability and academic achievement are different matters. Even if a student has language ability, this may not always manifest as academic achievement. In fact, what is necessary is not temporary scholastic ability, but a real language ability, the ability to communicate and express human gentleness in a manner considerate of others. Uenou suggested the concretization of the definition, purpose, and effect of "academic achievement" as the solution to this "paradox." "Academic achievement" in the area of deaf education and integration has not been discussed in this way. Many integrated children study in regular classrooms as "visitors" without understanding the purpose and the real effect of learning. They devote their time to the self-directed study at home in order to catch up with their lessons. Toshiharu Takeuchi tells a similar story of his own experience in his school days as a student hard of hearing. It is important to note that the essential cause of learning difficulties and low achievement is that children hard of hearing have been forced to be part of a learning environment in which they have insufficient support for their studies and information processing, and because the support systems that do exist have not worked well, according Uenou. Uenou's argument reveals the story behind the failure of a silent majority that has been overlooked despite integrated education's reputation for success. The systematic promotion of integration has produced this silent majority. What has, at first glance, been seen as an equalizer is in fact a discrimination device that makes new differentiations.

Many teachers and parents of children with hearing impairment tend to withdraw from the oral method and seek learning environments that teach sign language. Therefore, Japanese sign language is part of literacy education in the Japanese language. Recently, bilingual education has become a focus. At first, children learn the basics of sign language and then proceed to rise to higher level of competence. However, the differences and gaps between sign language and spoken Japanese continue to cause problems. According to Uenou, the social mission behind promoting the integration of deaf education has been literacy education, especially education in written Japanese. As the basis for the development of all academic skills and perceptions is the written language, it defines students' identities.

In the composition guidance portion of language arts, "the deafness sentence" has been regarded as an inferior and inappropriate sentence that includes errors of convention. For example, when children, basing their sentence structure on sign language, use handwritten words or type on a PC, they write sentences such as, "I am a pass of Tokyo instrumentation (a company name)"; "It is cleaning in a corridor"; or "What I did at an athletic meet is to run." These samples apply the pattern of the predicate to words such as "is" or "do," expressed by the same sign. They also rely on the grammar of sign language that deaf students already possess, and show logic in their meaning. Therefore, instead of regarding this writing

as “an error” or inferior, such “misuse” should be effectively utilized as shared infrastructure for reaching higher levels of understanding of the different grammars of sign language and the Japanese language. In most cases in regular classes, however, such sentences result in the deduction of points.

Language as a Barrier

At this point, it is necessary to return to the topic established earlier and discuss which language forms the culture of schools when certain communities are divided according to language. Yamada pointed out that the “issue of language” appeared in the 1960s and did not refer to a limited problem; rather, “a language problem” relates to the political interests of the groups in conflict with each other. It is usual for each group to have different interests, as no language planning or management can be neutral, free from all “interests” and politically disvalued. In other words, there are no interests that all community members share and none that cannot be criticized on grounds of justice or the principle of abstraction imposed from a higher level. This claim reflects the “process of politics” in which a group removes and changes the interests of other groups in order to prioritize its own interests.

Integration, in a phrase, is the mainstreaming of the disabled into the robust community of regular schools, which makes it difficult for different groups to relate to each other. In classrooms, the power figure defines learning abilities on the premise of hearing and speaking abilities. However, while many children and teachers accept and fit the “norm” of verbal language use, students in certain categories end up excluded from membership in the learning community because they are not able to use oral language. As Yamada suggested, this shows the difficulty of establishing the cooperation in communication. For example, in Japanese education of the 1960s, the inclusion of disabled people in the robust community was seen as categorically imperative for curing their impairment, and it was thought to be the only way to achieve social rehabilitation and participation. For the disabled and their family members, there seemed to be no hope in these years, except through medical care with the potential to cure the impairment. Far from affirming those with hearing disabilities, a negative view toward the disability and perceptions of the disability as undesirable spread among the general public. Having a disability means being immediately placed in lower education categories by people who do not pause to think about the principle behind of the stigma of deafness, and this situation has contributed to requests for integration as a break from segregated education.

Mashiko (2006) introduced the general idea of “the language right” for examining such a problem. Disability studies seems important to the attempt to solve and improve the conflict between the communities of the deaf and blind and the robust community. The “care,” “treatment,” and “consideration” of the “good experts” for handicapped recipients has been regarded as an obligatory intervention that led to domination. Oral education methods or inner ear operations were often the norm. In this way, for people with difficulty accessing normal spoken Japanese, language serves as a device that constitutes relations of domination and subordination. It forms new divisions between those who can commit to certain activities and causes alienation according to superiority and inferiority in scenes of integration. A deaf school was, in a phrase, the institutionalization of education for disabled children produced by ideas of paternalism, which suppressed sign language as a first language for deaf people and developed the principle of assimilated education, compelling students to engage spoken language. For example, the education of the disabled has been radically criticized for ghettoizing special education, leading to the push to integrate with general education and establish a system that adequately cares for students. Nonetheless, this argument does not necessarily apply to deaf education in regard to sign language. In previous eras, most school teachers of the deaf were hearing persons who forced their students to imitate the form of their mouths and make

utterances under “the principle of mouth talk,” forbidding the use of sign language. However, the students continued to engage voluntary sign language training, making the deaf school their primary speech community. It became impossible for people with the partial hearing loss that comes with old or middle age to participate in the culture of the deaf community. At that stage, their flexibility would have been lost due to physical changes to their bodies, making it difficult to learn sign language; additionally, few people who have learned language among the hearing can internalize deaf culture, a fact that also alienated those with partial hearing loss from deaf communities.

Implications from Curriculum Theory

The students of educational experience takes as hypothesis that at any given moment s/he is in a “biographic situation” (Pinar and Grumet, 1976), and Pinar (2004) adds that s/he is located in historical time and cultural place, but in a singularly meaningful way, a situation to be expressed in one’s meaning that follows from past situations, but which contains, perhaps unarticulated, contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of possible futures. Bruner (1996) indicates that curriculum has become to be a version of “cultural criticism” under the influence of literary and feminism theory.

The “tools” of recognition and enactment of the school curriculum derived from psychologies were directed to educational questions and not to the understanding of disciplinary practices (Popkewitz, 2014). Popkewitz suggests that the pedagogical translations coming to be curriculum are never merely a replica of the academic disciplines. They embody principles about who child is, should be, and who does not fit into the normalized cultural spaces. The formation of school subjects involved processes of selection and ordering in relation to the psychologies of didactics that were never merely learning disciplinary fields of knowledge (Popkewitz, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCHES

The disabled children learning in regular schools or regular classrooms often become isolated than learning in classes or schools for the handicapped, simply because substantial learning is not guaranteed. However, this does not justify automatically returning to the premise of segregation education, and there is some effective integration under present conditions. Dangers usually accompany integration in states that do not reform education. On the other hand, reform of the education system and changes to special schools are expected in the future when integration is fully accomplished.

In these days, the influence of globalization may bring long-term strains that must be overcome. In other words, strained relationship may emerge between mind and material, long- and short-term considerations, competition and equality of opportunity, and the limited ability of human beings to digest expanding and infinite knowledge. Moreover, there may be strains between global and local, universal and individual, traditional and modernized.

Education that promotes symbiosis of children with handicaps and normal children will not move ahead effectively by adopting uniform ways of thinking that simply assume those with handicaps only need a place to live together and to reductively learn to overcome obstacles and acquire abilities before being put away. This mindset may again cause dumping in the education of disabled children. Further analysis of the reform of the conventional system should aim to polish strategies for progress while also creating education systems that guarantee those with normal abilities and handicapped children develop their characters politely together in various situations, steadily engaging cooperation and collaboration at various levels.

As this examination has shown, the concept of literacy introduces an important viewpoint for considering the problem of the integration of disabled children in Japan. Literacy acts as the requisite tool that makes it possible for the disabled to learn, on the one hand, but it also acts as a factor that causes alienation from the learning community of regular classes. Besides, while literacy may have various uses for so-called normal children, for a child with hearing loss, its use is local and does not necessarily allow communication outside a specific community. In the United States, the main argument for racial integration was that it was a way for colored children to domesticate themselves within the “normal” school culture. Similarly, in Japan, literacy is seen as a normalizing force. Thus, to investigate special education and integration, it is necessary to examine literacy apart from disability, curability, or medical care.

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